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THE SEMINARY OF TOMORROW

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It may be objected to our title that it begs the most important question at issue. Who knows whether tomorrow there will be any seminary? In the stern competition that is before us no institution can hope to survive which does not prove itself indispensable. What right have we to assume that the seminary will be found in this class?

This leads to a more fundamental question still, namely, the question of the future of the church. The seminary exists to train ministers. Its future is therefore wrapped up in the future of the church that it serves. The question whether the seminary is to continue to hold its central place in our educational system is the question whether the church is to continue to hold its central place in the life of mankind. To answer this question we must take one step further and raise the question of the future of religion. Is religion in the future, as in the past, to prove itself one of the major interests of mankind, something which deserves the central place in time, in thought, in money, in personal consecration and sacrifice, which it has held in the past? If it is, then the church will continue and with the church the seminary, for the church is simply the application to the field of religion of the principles of organization which are involved in the nature of society itself.

I think we are safe in taking it for granted that whatever else we may succeed in dispensing with in the period of reconstruction after the war, it will not be religion.

In this time of crisis, as so often in the past, religion has demonstrated again its perennial vitality. We see that it is not something imposed upon man from without as a result of precept and doctrine, whether human or divine, but is rooted in the nature of man himself. Religion is the cry of the heart for some firm basis for faith in a world where all things are shaking. If there is any one thing which the war may be said to have proved, it is this.

Religion then, we may take it for granted, will last, and with religion its institutions, the church and the seminary. But will this religion still be Christianity, understanding by this word the religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? In the new world which will face us after the war can we still make a case for the principles of him who has taught us to believe that God is love, that He saves by sacrifice, that His purpose is brotherhood, that the law of His Kingdom is ministry?

Whether this will be so or not will depend in no small part upon the seminary of tomorrow. It will depend upon what we who are teachers teach about the religion we call Christianity, and how we teach it.

There was a time not so many years ago when the lot of a teacher, at least in this country, was not an enviable one. In the competition of the professions he seemed to have been left behind. The great rewards went to other callings — the law, business, engineering, commerce. Teaching — and in this I include the ministry — was regarded as an easy job, something that might be turned over to the men who were not robust enough to fight their way to the front in the real battle of life. The scientist indeed, especially in the field of the physical sciences, was respected because he could do things that were practical, like inventing wireless, or devising aéropplanes and submarines. But today we are not so sure that science pure and simple is so beneficent a thing as

we had once supposed. We have learned that power alone is morally neutral, and the greater it is, the more harm it will do unless it is guided aright.

And so we are coming to a new understanding of the significance of the teacher's work. What is it that explains the gigantic power of the Germans in the war? How comes it that their people have been so united in support of a cause that seems to us so abominable? It is because of the character of the teaching which they have had. For a generation their minds have been shaped to this very end, and all the resources of university and school and church have been bent to the one task of making loyalty to the State appear the supreme virtue. It is not the armies of Germany alone that we have been fighting, but her philosophy, and it is with philosophy that the teacher has to do.

If then we are to gain the complete victory we desire, it will not be enough to have defeated the armies of Germany in the field. We must conquer her philosophy. We must show that the ideal in which we believe and for which we have been fighting is rooted more deeply in human nature, makes an appeal more profound and satisfying to human need, and offers a broader scope to human aspiration than its rival. We must not stop with *saying* that democracy is a better form of social organization than autocracy. We must show wherein and for what reason this is true.

This gives the seminary its unique opportunity. For the seminary is the teacher of teachers. In its class-rooms are to be formed the ideals which must inspire the leaders of the next generation, as they go out to interpret the Christian Gospel to the men and women who must live their lives under the new conditions which are now confronting us after the war.

If we take our present system of ministerial training as a whole we find that there are two main evils from

which it suffers. The first is denominationalism, and the second, intellectualism. By denominationalism I mean the spirit which identifies Christianity with the form of religion represented in one's own communion. It must be confessed that this spirit has in the past dominated the teaching of far too many seminaries. The student is indeed reminded of the existence of other branches of the Christian church and given some information as to their history, but his teacher makes little effort to interpret their significance as they appear to those who look at them from the inside. They are presented as erroneous or, at most, inadequate forms of Christianity which it is sufficient to treat as the Levite treated the man who had fallen among thieves. We may bow to them and pass by on the other side.

By intellectualism I mean the disposition to think of Christianity primarily as a series of beliefs, or at least of practices and experiences which follow upon the acceptance of such beliefs. We have been accustomed to think of Christianity as a deposit of doctrine which has come down to us from the past, and must be transmitted to the future unchanged, rather than as a living spiritual movement which is to be judged by its effects upon the life of its adherents as a whole. In both these respects the seminary reflects the church at large. People think of a denomination as a group of men banded together to propagate a type of belief, and this conception of the function of a denomination is one of the chief reasons which explains the failure of the church to command the whole-hearted allegiance of many thoughtful men.

It is not my purpose here to criticize denominational Christianity. As good Protestants we may believe that in the providence of God each of the great historic churches has fulfilled a necessary function and is the custodian today of precious and indispensable truth. One may believe that he is the best Christian, in the

broad and catholic understanding of Christianity, who is most familiar with and who most highly values those historic forms in which the universal gospel has been brought to him in his own inner life. But such sympathetic understanding of historic Christianity is quite a different thing from denominationalism in the sense in which we are speaking about it now. By denominationalism in this sense is meant a narrow view of life, a view that is content to think of God and of Jesus Christ in those particular forms and ways of working that are nearest and most congenial to the individual Christian, and to ignore those wider activities and interests which are dear to other Christians. Denominationalism in this sense is by no means confined to conservatives. There is a narrowness of liberalism which differs little, if at all, from the narrowness of the most reactionary conservative. It is no uncommon thing to find students, and for that matter, teachers, who, having gained a new conception of the Bible as the result of modern critical studies, have henceforth little interest in or respect for men who have found their way to Christ by the older ways; men who believe that in the interest of some vague thing which they call modern thought or the scientific spirit, they can throw overboard the historic forms of the past and set up some brand new form of Christianity of their own in their place. Such an attitude is twin brother to the denominational spirit and, like it, is a foe against which we must contend in the interests of the seminary of tomorrow.

This narrow conception of the function of the teacher of religion has its roots in an intellectualistic philosophy, a philosophy which identifies religion primarily with belief. Here too I would not be misunderstood. As good Protestants we must recognize that belief has a most important part to play in religion. It makes a difference what a man thinks about God; but belief, even in this

highest of spheres, is after all not primary but secondary. God and Christ, sin and salvation, the church and the Kingdom of God, are realities which we come to know by living, that is to say, through sentiment and action and all those many-sided vital processes which we sum up together under the name of experience. And just as men differ in their theories of the State and of the school who may yet share the common life of citizens and engage together in the quest of knowledge, so there is a bond of union between Christians which persists in spite of their differing philosophies. This fact has been too little recognized in our theological teaching and has not had the formative influence which it should have in shaping our curriculum.

As a result we see a reaction against current methods of seminary instruction which takes two different forms. One is a reemphasis upon feeling in religion. We see this in great revival movements like the Billy Sunday campaign. Here men are brought together under conditions which appeal primarily to the emotions, and the function of the teacher in religion is reduced to a minimum. The other reaction is in the direction of practice, and may be typified by the Young Men's Christian Association. In the Young Men's Christian Association, as it is functioning today in the army, we see a practical agency of the highest efficiency, bringing together men of very different antecedents and varieties of training, and combining them in various helpful practical activities of social and moral character. All this is done in the name of religion, and no one who has followed the work of the Association closely can fail to rejoice in the beneficent influence it is exerting. But when we study the type of religion which is presented in the Association-program, we find that it is often one-sided and inadequate. The church as an institution is not made prominent. The differences of conviction which divide the different Chris-

tian communions are ignored, and the appeal is made to a practical religion of fellowship and helpfulness, which, so far as it goes, is admirable, but which lacks the theoretical foundation which is necessary to a healthy and robust intellectual life.

We face, then, two alternatives, neither of which holds out large promise for the future. On the one hand, we may perpetuate the old denominational intellectualistic type of religious instruction; on the other, we may substitute a vague inarticulate Christianity of sentiment or of practical expediency, which has lost its consciousness of the historic past from which it has come. Neither of these offers us a hopeful outlook. Between the two there must be some other and better way.

We may take as our point of departure three propositions, which I think we may safely assume to have been demonstrated by the experience of the last three years. They are not new. We had already come to recognize them to a very considerable extent, but the war has brought them clearly into the foreground of consciousness. First, the religion of the future must be to a greater extent than it has been in the past a religion for the whole man, a religion, that is to say, which takes into account not simply what a man believes but what he feels and what he does. We have been learning to our surprise — shall I say, to our dismay? — how large a part sentiment plays in the determination of conduct. We are the creatures of our likes and of our dislikes. Our sense of honor and our sense of pride, our sense of loyalty and our revulsion against what we conceive to be mean, all that side of our nature which expresses itself in feelings of satisfaction or of disapproval, we now see to be a potent factor in determining what we shall do. We must apply this insight to religion. We must think of religion as man's emotional reaction to the great unseen realities by which he is surrounded, the response of his spirit to

deep-seated needs rooted in his very nature. We must not confine religion to that part of it which is precipitated in our formal creeds or expressed in our definite acts of worship. We must widen and deepen the foundation on which we build for the future.

Secondly, within this common realm of experience we note differences of type which persist. The difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant springs at once to mind. In the past we have thought of this too largely in terms of right and wrong belief. We have contrasted Protestantism with its emphasis upon Bible texts with Catholicism as the religion which has substituted for this human traditions; and there is truth in this contrast, no doubt. But we are coming to see that it is not the whole truth. In Catholic and Protestant we have to do with different types of the religious life itself. Catholic religious experience is in general of the mystical type; Protestant religious experience, of the ethical type. This is a contrast which is not confined to Christianity but is found in other religions as well, and is likely to persist as long as religion lasts because it is rooted in human nature. So within Protestantism we find other persisting types. There is the extreme individualist, who insists upon the right of the soul to direct access to God and feels the intrusion of any intermediary a disturbing factor; and there is the man of artistic temperament, to whom form and ritual and sacrament are the natural means of approach to the Divine. There is the man who emphasizes the permanent element in religion and rejoices in the stability which it brings; and there is the one who, like Professor Hocking, thinks of religion as essentially creative and values it because it is continually bringing new things to pass. We cannot expect that any one of these types will completely supersede the other. Somehow the religion of the future must make place for them all.

But, thirdly, side by side with this recognition of difference we find a great longing for unity, a feeling that somehow Christianity is a larger and more comprehensive thing than our own cross-section of it, however dear to us that may be. We find men of all schools and of all churches feeling after something better and bigger and more enduring than anything that they have known in the past, and we are sure that somehow the religion of the future must give us this.

This situation sets the seminary of tomorrow its task. We must teach Christianity and our own particular form of it to men who are living in a world like this, with longings and aspirations and desires and convictions such as these.

This does not mean that we are to surrender our own convictions. It does not mean that we are to teach an indefinite, inarticulate, formless religion. Quite the contrary. It is our function to make our religion definite, to provide the solid basis of thought that shall direct our sentiments to useful ends and cause them to issue in fruitful acts. But our thinking must be done in the light of this larger environment and with a spirit of sympathy broader and more inclusive than has characterized much of our teaching in the past.

This conviction will determine our attitude toward the other great religions which dispute the field with Christianity. As Christians it will be our first business to define what is the distinctive thing that Christianity has to offer them; but we shall think of them not as mere perversions, areas of black on a map otherwise pure white, but as ways in which the religious nature of man has been feeling its way after the truth. We shall present Christ as the answer to their needs, supplying that which they lack, correcting their defects, opening for them possibilities of new development along lines for which their own past has fitted them, as our past has

been fitting us for new experiences and development of our own.

It will affect our attitude toward the varieties of the Christian experience. We shall not try to make all men agree with us, but we shall try to carry the spirit of Christ into our own living and thinking to such an extent that we shall be able to recognize that spirit when it manifests itself in men of a different type. We shall eagerly reach across the barriers which now divide us to find some common bond of unity, and we shall find that bond where all true Christians must find it, in the person and the work and the spirit of Jesus Christ.

So in like manner of those more technical differences which divide us into schools. We shall not be less zealous to promote our own type of philosophy. We shall wish to help others to the explanation and interpretation of the Christian facts which we have found most helpful to ourselves, but we shall be careful to distinguish between the interpretation and the facts. We shall be quick to recognize that those who do not agree with our theory may yet share our experience and work with us for the great end we have in common.

In the light of such considerations we must approach the problem of the seminary curriculum. More even than it has been in the past the seminary of the future must be a training school for ministers, men, that is to say, who have given themselves to a definite task. All that we do must be shaped to this end. No study must be admitted to the curriculum, no matter how attractive it may be, that cannot be shown to have some direct bearing on the minister's task. And conversely, no study must be omitted from the curriculum, however great the tax it may make on time and energy, which can be shown to be necessary for ministerial efficiency.

Next, we must train men for a specialized ministry. If a man is going to be a minister of a particular denomina-

tion, he ought to know the conditions of successful service in that denomination. He ought to know the history of his church, its organization, its missionary activities, and whatever else goes to make up the life of the denomination as a whole. The Presbyterian must know the history of Presbyterianism, the Methodist of Methodism, the Episcopalian of his own communion, and so on. Again, the minister must be trained for the special field in which he is going to work. If he is to work in a country parish, he must have one kind of training; if his work is to be among immigrants, he will need another. If his field is a pastorate in an industrial community, or if he is specializing in religious education, or if he plans to be a foreign missionary, in each case we must see that he knows the things that are essential to success in that field.

But with all our interest in this specialized training we must be careful never to lose sight of the things we have in common. At the core of all the separate studies of the curriculum there is a body of common knowledge which every minister must possess. It is the knowledge of the Christian religion. What does it mean to be a Christian? Who and what is the God whom Christians worship? Wherein consists the Christian revelation? What shall we think of Christ, of the sin from which he came to deliver us, of the salvation he mediates, of the life to which we look forward here and hereafter? What is the church of which we are ministers, not in the narrow denominational meaning of that term, as Baptist or Presbyterian, but in its unity as the Church of Christ, of which these lesser branches are parts? What is the place which each holds in the unity of Christ's body, and how can we who minister in any one of the parts coöperate most effectively with our brothers who serve in the others? These and such as these are the questions which those of us must face who are working out the curriculum for the seminary of tomorrow.

For one thing this will mean that Systematic Theology will recover again its central place in the organism of theological study. But it will be taught in a different way. It will become the study which defines the nature of the gospel for a world that is seeking unity through variety. That old discipline that used to be called Symbolics, whose function it was to compare the creeds of the different churches, will be taken down from the shelf and revived in a new form. In the seminary of tomorrow it will be just as much the business of the Baptist to know what Presbyterians and Episcopalian—I will not say *believe*, but *value and revere*, as it will be for him to know the history and traditions of his own communion. So history will be studied not simply from the past forward, but from the present back. We shall ask ourselves what history can tell us as to the origin and significance of the chief contemporary forms of the living religion with which we have to do. And the Bible will become a new study as we think of it not simply as the record of God's revelation in the past given once for all, but as the source of a continuing inspiration through which from generation to generation Christians have renewed their contact with the divine, and in which men of different types of Christian experience have alike found food for their souls. Thus in all our study the practical purpose of gaining sympathetic understanding with our fellow Christians for the purpose of effective coöperation will be dominant, and many a subject which in the past has seemed trite and profitless because devoid of practical bearing, will come at last to its own.

So to conceive of theological education is not to lower our intellectual standards. There is in many quarters a false opposition between science and practice, as though a man knew things better the farther removed he was from the sphere of their application. This is a view for which experience affords no justification. On

the contrary, we shall find that the practical interest, if properly guided and controlled, will bear large fruit for science in research and its resulting theory.

Of the application of these principles in detail this is not the place to speak. It will, of course, be necessary to distinguish between different types of institutions to which the problem presents itself in different ways. The seminary at a distance from a great university, teaching a constituency of students most if not all of whom are going into a single church, will necessarily solve its problem differently from an institution in close affiliation with a great university, to which students of many communions come for their theological training. But in spite of these differences, the task is essentially the same, and it should be possible to work out a plan of coöperation between seminaries that will enable each group to coöperate helpfully with the others.

What has been said about the ideal of seminary instruction applies in substance to the work of the church as a whole. Protestantism has always stood for the teaching function of the minister. Its strength consists in the fact that it trusts the layman to form his own judgment in matters of religion and refuses to regard the ministry as a separate and isolated caste. But this means that Protestantism stands or falls with its ability to instruct the people at large in the meaning of the religion they profess. For this reason one of the most disturbing symptoms of the last generation has been the decline of the teaching office of the minister. It is not too much to say that in very large measure Protestantism has surrendered to Roman Catholicism that very function to which it owes its own existence. It is not the Protestant but the Catholic who is today teaching the layman the meaning of the religion which he professes. Go into the larger Catholic churches today and you will find for sale at the door little tracts which explain, in simple language

that the layman can understand, the meaning of the church and its institutions. But a man might attend many a Protestant church for years and remain as ignorant of what Protestantism means as when he first found his way to the church door. The war with its resulting revelation of our disunion has recalled us to the perils of this situation. We must see to it that in the future the laymen of our churches are better instructed. As Protestants we stand for the rights of the individual in religion. We have rejected an implicit faith; we believe that each man must stand on his own feet in the presence of God and be able to give an intelligent reason for his belief. This fundamental tenet of our Protestantism we must restore to the central place from which it has been for the time dethroned.

It will not be easy to do. Let us not deceive ourselves on this point. To build a unified church on the basis of autocracy is not hard. It has been done again and again. To build a unified church on the basis of freedom requires a degree of intelligence and discipline to which as yet few of our churches have attained. It is the same problem which faces us in religion as in democracy itself. How can we who accept the principle of free determination as the supreme law of the State succeed in uniting men of different races and ideals in a single community of free peoples? Somehow it must be done unless all our struggle and sacrifice is to be in vain. But we shall not succeed in doing it in the State unless we succeed in doing it in the church, and to show how this can be done will be the supreme office of the seminary of tomorrow.